



# Take 5

For Safety



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

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## Manage stress for a happy holiday

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The holiday season is a time you want to share with friends and Family. But an unwanted problem may come through the door at the same time: stress.

“We know the holidays can be stressful, even for Family members who normally get along well,” said Dr. Patricia LeDuc, U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center Human Factors Task Force director. “Too much traveling, too much shopping and too much celebrating can make for an unhappy holiday.”

According to the Mayo Clinic, if you can recognize stress, you may be able to manage it. The following three topics can be a hotbed of holiday stress:

- **Relationships.** Relationships can cause turmoil, conflict or stress at any time, but tensions are often heightened during the holidays. Family misunderstandings and conflicts can intensify — especially if you're thrust together for several days. On the other hand, facing the holidays without a loved one can be tough and leave you feeling lonely and sad.
- **Finances.** With the added expenses of gifts, travel, food and entertainment, the holidays can put a strain on your budget and your peace of mind. In addition, overspending now can mean financial worries for months to come.
- **Physical demands.** Even die-hard holiday enthusiasts may find extra shopping and socializing leaves them wiped out. Being exhausted increases your stress, creating a vicious cycle. Exercise and sleep — good antidotes for stress and fatigue — may take a backseat to chores and errands. To top it off, burning the wick at both ends makes you more susceptible to colds and other unwelcome guests.

The Mayo Clinic offers these tips to help everyone have a pleasant holiday:

- **Acknowledge your feelings.** If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones, realize it's normal to feel sadness and grief. It's OK to take time to cry or express your feelings.
- **Reach out.** If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events for support and companionship. Volunteering your time to help others is another good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships.

- **Be realistic.** The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like last year. As Families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones. For example, if your adult children can't come to your house, find new ways to celebrate together such as sharing pictures, emails or videotapes.
- **Set aside differences.** Try to accept Family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all your expectations. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion, and be understanding if others get upset or distressed when something goes awry.
- **Stick to a budget.** Before you go gift and food shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend and stick to your budget. Don't try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts. Try alternatives like donating to a charity in someone's name, giving homemade gifts or starting a family gift exchange.
- **Plan ahead.** Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other activities. Plan your menus and make a shopping list to help prevent last-minute scrambling to buy forgotten ingredients. Also make sure to line up help for party preparation and cleanup.
- **Learn to say no.** Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity. If it's not possible to say no when your boss asks you to work overtime, try to remove something else from your agenda to make up for the lost time.
- **Don't abandon healthy habits.** Don't let the holidays become a free-for-all. Overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt. Have a healthy snack before holiday parties so you don't go overboard on sweets, cheese or drinks. Continue to get plenty of sleep and physical activity.
- **Take a breather.** Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Listen to soothing music or find something else that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner calm.
- **Seek professional help if you need it.** Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless or unable to face routine chores. If these feelings continue, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.

If the holidays are something you dread, take steps to prevent stress and depression. With planning, you may enjoy the holidays more than you thought you would.

For more information on making the holidays safe, visit <https://safety.army.mil/>.

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